

## Sūrah Qalam

### Central Theme

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Mulk, the previous *sūrah*. Thus there is no principal difference between the central themes and topics of the two. The difference lies in the style, nature of arguments and the tone adopted. Just as in the previous *sūrah* the Quraysh are warned of the punishment of the Day of Judgement and of the punishment which they will face in this world if they deny the punishment of the Day of Judgement, similar is the warning sounded in this *sūrah*. However, this *sūrah* is more stern in its tone.

### Relationship with Previous Sūrah and Analysis of the Discourse

At the end of the previous *sūrah*, the Quraysh were addressed through the tongue of the Prophet (sws) and told: *قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَهْلَكَنِیَ اللَّهُ وَمَنْ مَعِيَ أَوْ رَحِمَنَا* (Ask them: “Have you ever thought that if Allah destroys me and my companions or has mercy on us, who shall save the disbelievers from an afflictive doom?”) The implication was that they should not be crazy enough to think that the Prophet (sws) was a poet or a lunatic who will soon be destroyed by the vicissitudes of time. Even if their desire was fulfilled, they still had no grounds for remaining content. The question that still remained for them is who would save them from the punishment of God! In order to support this very premise, a comparison is made in this *sūrah* between the preaching of the Prophet (sws), the Book presented by him and his lofty character with the wicked and corrupt leadership of the Quraysh. The purpose of this comparison is to show that soon it would become evident to friend and foe that those who were in the grasp of the wretched leaders were being led to ruin and those who were the guided shall attain success.

After this, the Quraysh are admonished through the parable of the people of the orchard that the peace and security they have today should not mislead them to think that they would remain with them forever. The God Who has blessed them with these has the power to take them away too. If they have no fear of Him, then they should remember that He can deprive them of these blessings in the blink of an eye and leave them to brood over the consequences.

At the end of the *sūrah*, the addressees are vehemently ticked off over

---

a false notion: they thought that if ever the Hereafter came, they would be blessed with the same favours there, in fact even more. They are asked how they have regarded God to be so unjust that He would equate the righteous with the wrongdoers. At the same time, they are challenged that if they have any oath from God in this regard or if there are some people who have assured them of this, then they should present its evidence. In this very connection, the Prophet (sws) is assured that he should not worry about the vain talk of these people. When the upheaval of the Day of Judgement takes place, then they will come to know how far their dreams were from reality.

At the end, the Prophet (sws) is informed that these people have been caught in the long noose of the respite given to them by God. Strong is God's scheme; there is no possibility for them to escape. So the Prophet (sws) should wait for the decision of God, and should not follow Jonah (sws) in showing impatience in this matter as a result of which he had to face a severe trial.

### Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ (۱) مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ (۲) وَإِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجْرًا غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ (۳) وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَى خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ (۴) فَسَتُبْصِرُ وَيُبْصِرُونَ (۵) بِأَيِّكُمْ الْمَقْتُولُ (۶) إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ (۷) فَلَا تُطِعِ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ (۸) وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ (۹) وَلَا تُطِعِ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَهِينٍ (۱۰) هَمَّازٍ مَشْأٍ بَنِيمٍ (۱۱) مَنَاجٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ (۱۲) عُتْلٌ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ رَنِيمٍ (۱۳) أَنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ (۱۴) إِذَا تُتْلَى عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ (۱۵) سَنَسِفُهُ عَلَى الْحُطُومِ (۱۶) إِنَّا بَلَوْنَاهُمْ كَمَا بَلَوْنَا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا لَيَصْرِمُنَّهَا مُصْبِحِينَ (۱۷) وَلَا يَسْتَنْتُونَ (۱۸) فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا طَائِفٌ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ (۱۹) فَأَصْبَحَتْ كَالصَّرِيمِ (۲۰) فَتَنَادُوا مُصْبِحِينَ (۲۱) أَنْ اغْدُوا عَلَى حَرْثِكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (۲۲) فَانْظَرُوا لَهُمْ يَتَخَفَتُونَ (۲۳) أَنْ لَا يَدْخُلَهَا الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِسْكِينٌ (۲۴) وَغَدُوا عَلَى حَرْدٍ قَادِرِينَ (۲۵) فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهَا قَالُوا إِنَّا لَضَالُونَ (۲۶) بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ (۲۷) قَالَ أَوْسَطُهُمْ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ لَوْلَا تُسَبِّحُونَ (۲۸) قَالُوا سُبْحَانَ رَبَّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ (۲۹) فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَلَوْمُونَ (۳۰) قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا طَاغِينَ (۳۱)

عَسَىٰ رَبُّنَا أَنْ يُبَدِّلَنَا خَيْرًا مِنْهَا إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا رَاغِبُونَ (٣٢) كَذَلِكَ الْعَذَابُ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٣) إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٍ النَّعِيمِ (٣٤) أَفَنَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ (٣٥) مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (٣٦) أَمْ لَكُمْ كِتَابٌ فِيهِ تَدْرُسُونَ (٣٧) إِنَّ لَكُمْ فِيهِ لَمَا يَتَخَيَّرُونَ (٣٨) أَمْ لَكُمْ أَيْمَانٌ عَلَيْنَا بِالْعَقَّةِ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ لَكُمْ لَمَا تَحْكُمُونَ (٣٩) سَلِّمُوا أَهْلَهُمْ بِذَلِكَ رَعِيمٌ (٤٠) أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ فُلْيَئُتُوا بِشُرَكَائِهِمْ إِنْ كَانُوا صَادِقِينَ (٤١) يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَنْ سَاقٍ وَيُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ (٤٢) خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ وَقَدْ كَانُوا يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ وَهُمْ سَالِمُونَ (٤٣) فَذَرْنِي وَمَنْ يُكَذِّبْ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٤٤) وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ (٤٥) أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ أَجْرًا فَهُمْ مِنْ مَغْرَمٍ مُثْقَلُونَ (٤٦) أَمْ عِنْدَهُمُ الْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُمُونَ (٤٧) فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُنْ كَصَاحِبِ الْحُوتِ إِذْ نَادَىٰ وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ (٤٨) لَوْلَا أَنْ تَدَارَكُهُ نِعْمَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ لَبَدَّ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ مَذْمُومٌ (٤٩) فَاجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَجَعَلَهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (٥٠) وَإِنْ يَكَادُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُوا الذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ لَمَجْنُونٌ (٥١) وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (٥٢)

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Ever-Merciful.

This is Sūrah Nūn. By the pen and by that which they write that you are not, by the grace of your Lord, possessed, and indeed for you is a reward unending, and you are of a lofty character. So soon you shall see and they shall also see with which of the groups is the one who has been led away. Your Lord only best knows those who have strayed from His path and those who are rightly guided. (1-7)

So, give no heed to these rejecters. They desire that you be flexible, then they will also become flexible. And heed not every person who is swearer of false oaths, despicable, maker of evil gestures, who goes about sowing seeds of dissension, forbidding of good, transgressor, usurper of rights, cruel and moreover is rootless. This character is so because he has wealth and children. When Our revelations are recited to him he cries out: "These are but tales of the ancients." Soon on his trunk will We brand him. (8-16)

We put them through a test just as We put the owners of the orchard through a test when they swore that they would surely pick the fruit of their orchard in the morning and would not leave anything. Then whilst they were asleep, a mover from your Lord moved through it in such a manner that it became like a crop harvested. At daybreak, they called out

to one another: "Go early in the morning to your plantation if you are to pick its fruit." Then off they went whispering to one another: "No needy person should set foot in this orchard today." And they proceeded with resolve and determination. But when they saw it, they cried out: "Surely we have lost our way; in fact, we have been ruined." Said a somewhat balanced person among them: "Did I not tell you: 'why do you not glorify the Lord?'" Then they cried out: "Glory be to our Lord; indeed it is we who were the wrong-doers." Then they started blaming one another: "Woe to us." they cried. "We have been great transgressors. Perhaps our Lord will give us in its place a better orchard than it. To Him do we now turn." In such a way, shall the punishment come, and the punishment of the Hereafter shall be much greater than this. Would that these people only knew! (17-33)

Indeed for the pious, there are gardens of bliss with their Lord. Should We equate the obedient with the wrongdoers? What is the matter with you? What is this judgement you make? Have you a scripture in which you read that you will have whatever you desire? Or have you oaths with Us binding till the Day of Judgement that you will have what you yourselves ordain? Ask them: "Who among them will take responsibility of this?" Do they have some associates? Let them produce these associates if what they say be true. (34-41)

They must remember the day when a great tumult will take place, and they will be called to bow in adoration and they will not be able to do so. Downcast shall be their looks; ignominy shall cover them. And they also used to be called to bow in adoration when they were normal. (42-43)

So leave Me with those who are denying this Discourse. We are gradually bringing them from a place they know not. And I am giving them respite. Indeed, very truly powerful is My scheme. (44-45)

Are you demanding some payment from them so that they are burdened with its penalty? Or is it that they have knowledge of the Unseen; thus they are writing it down? So with patience wait for the judgement of your Lord and be not like the companion of the fish when he called His Lord in anguish. Had not the favour of His Lord found him, he would have remained in the wilderness in disgrace. So His Lord chose him and placed him among the righteous. (46-50)

And when these disbelievers hear the reminder, they look at you as if they would almost make you stumble with their eyes and say: "He is surely possessed." Yet it is only a reminder to all mankind. (51-52)

---

**Explanation**

ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ<sup>1</sup>

Just as in the opening verse of Sūrah Qāf (50:1), the name of the *sūrah* is mentioned as Qāf, similarly in the opening verse of this *sūrah* its name is mentioned as Nūn. According to linguistic principles of Arabic, the *mubtadaā* (inchoative) is suppressed here, which I have revealed in the translation. While explaining the opening verses of Sūrah Baqarah, I have already alluded to the opinion of Imām Farāhī regarding the *hurūf-i muqatta‘āt* (the abbreviated letters at the *sūrah* openings). According to him, these are names of their respective *sūrahs* and are used to signify some meaning. Though the meanings of most of these letters are now lost, however, some of them have survived to this day. In order to substantiate his theory, one of the letters he has cited is Nūn that still signifies its ancient meaning: fish. By naming this *sūrah* thus, the allusion is to the Prophet Jonah (sws) who had been swallowed by a fish. Thus at the very end of the *sūrah*, he is addressed as *ṣāhib al-hūt* (companion of the fish). In verse eighty seven of Sūrah Anbiyā, he is also addressed as *dhū al-nūn* which has precisely the same meaning as *ṣāhib al-hūt*.

The letter و (*waw*) here denotes an oath. I have explained many times earlier in this *tafsīr* that in the Qur’ān such oaths are meant to substantiate a claim(s). Here, as shall be presently explained, three claims are substantiated.

First, it is an utter idiocy of the opponents of the Prophet (sws) to call him a person possessed. He is not an insane person; in fact, by the grace of God, he is sanest of all people.

Second, if these opponents think that all the efforts of the Prophet (sws) will be short-lived, then this is a false notion. There is unending reward for him both in this world and in that to come.

Third, he possesses a lofty character; hence those who are ignoring him by regarding him to be a poet or a mad person are only inviting their doom.

At various instances, the Qur’ān has presented itself to substantiate these claims. Thus, there is a strong indication that the verse وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ actually refers to the Qur’ān. Moreover, there is a narrative from Mujāhid that the word “pen” refers to the pen with which the Qur’ān was being written and the expression “that which they write” refers to the Qur’ān itself.<sup>2</sup>

1. This is Sūrah Nūn. By the pen and by that from which they write.

2. Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Tā’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, vol. 29, (Beirut Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī, 2001), 23.

It needs to be kept in mind that teaching by the pen is one of the greatest favours of the Almighty. Thus it is said in Sūrah ‘Alaq: اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ (96:3-5) (Read and the fact is that your Lord is the most Bounteous who taught by the pen. He taught man what he knew not, (96:3-5)). Earlier prophets of God orally taught their followers and it was very difficult to preserve those oral teachings. They would soon become adulterated or would be erased from memories. In order to protect religion from this danger, the Almighty taught man the use of the pen and writing. This made it possible for him to gain knowledge through writing instead of gaining it orally. Thus, first of all, he was given the ten commandments of the Torah written on stone tablets. The teachings of the later prophets were also written. Finally, the Qur’ān, the last word of God was preserved in such an elaborate manner that there could remain no possibility of any alteration in it till the Day of Judgement.

It is because of this importance of the pen that the Almighty has sworn by it. In my opinion, it does not refer to any specific pen; it refers to all the written record of divine teachings which was preserved through the pen ie. the Torah, the Psalms and the Injīl etc. The teachings of these sacred scriptures also attest to the Prophethood of Muḥammad (sws), and also found in them are indubitable testimonies to his advent. I have already explained these earlier in this *tafsīr*.

Contextual indications show that the words وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ (what they are writing) refer to the Qur’ān which was being revealed at that time and was being written by the Companions (rta). After an oath sworn by the previous scriptures, this is an oath sworn by the Qur’ān. It has been presented as an evidence to the veracity, civility and the prophethood of Muḥammad (sws). What is implied is that the very exaltedness and loftiness of the discourse of the person who is presenting it shows that he is not a poet or a person possessed; he is, in fact, a messenger of God.

It should be kept in consideration that in response to such allegations of the disbelievers, the Almighty has generally presented the Qur’ān before them so that they can see and justly judge whether such words can be produced by some poet, soothsayer or mad person or whether they originate from God.

مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ<sup>3</sup>

This is the complement of the oath: All previous scriptures, and this Qur’ān which is being written bear witness that the Prophet (sws) is not a

---

3. That, by the grace of your Lord, you are not possessed.

person possessed; he is, in fact, imparting people the same teachings as were imparted by all other prophets of God from Adam (sws) to Jesus (sws) upon whose veracity history bears witness. If these self-styled intellectuals are calling him a person possessed, he should not feel sad; he is not insane; in fact, by the grace of his Lord, he is the sanest of all people; it is only that these reckless intellectuals have lost their senses and are not able to distinguish between the sane and the insane.

The reason that the Quraysh called the Prophet (sws) mad was that their leaders were totally unable to understand from where the punishment with which he was emphatically and vehemently warning them as if he had seen it with his very eyes would arrive. They were worried that the extra-ordinary conviction found in his tone, the superhuman concern and anxiety found in his preaching endeavours and the heart-melting affection and sympathy found in his manner of reminding people was greatly influencing the masses. For this reason, they wanted to convince people that his anxiety and concern were not because there was any imminent danger of they being punished and that the Almighty had actually sent him to forewarn them of this punishment; the fact of the matter was that he was afflicted with hallucinations which made him imagine its coming from all sides. In order to further strengthen their claim, they would add that he was under some magical spell which had mentally deranged him and caused such nonsensical conversation from him.

وَإِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجْرًا غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ<sup>4</sup>

This verse states positively what was said negatively earlier on: foolish are they who regarding the Prophet (sws) to be crazy await his devastation through the vicissitudes of time; it is they who, on the contrary, are destined to be devastated; for the Prophet (sws) there is an everlasting reward; these arrogant people whose affluence has made them proud are facing an imminent punishment, and soon they will face the consequences of this conceit; contrary to them, the Prophet (sws) will receive a never ending reward for his adherence to the truth.

The word غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ means “unending”. Some people have interpreted it differently; however, this interpretation is not only against linguistic principles of Arabic, it is also against other parallel verses of the Qur’ān.

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ<sup>5</sup>

The Prophet (sws) is addressed and told that just as prophets before

4. And indeed for you is a reward unending,

5. And you are of a lofty character.

him had exemplary characters, he too has a lofty character. In fact, this character of his is a conclusive answer to those who by regarding him to be a poet, a soothsayer or a madman want to convince themselves and their masses that soon his influence will die away.

At many places in the Qur'ān, the lofty character of the Prophet (sws) is presented to substantiate the truth of his mission. In Sūrah Shu'arā', the moral depletion of poets and soothsayers, their intellectual ramblings and the lack of correspondence between what they claim and what they practice is discussed in detail, and those people are rebuked who regard the Prophet (sws) to be among this ignoble group. They are asked what is the relationship of the exalted character of the Prophet with the character of these soothsayers and poets whose inner and outer selves are equally dreadful.

فَسَتُبْصِرُ وَيُبْصِرُونَ بِأَيِّكُمْ الْمَقْتُولُ<sup>6</sup> (٦-٥)

This is an assurance to the Prophet (sws) and a threat to his opponents. If they want to belittle his mission by regarding him to be a person possessed, he should show patience. Very soon, he shall see and they shall also see which of the two are with the person who has been led away: the believers who are led by the Prophet (sws) or the Quraysh are who led by Abū Lahab and Abū Jahal. The implication is that the time of judgement is near, and soon reality will manifest itself. Very soon all will see who had been led away by Satan and had thereby ruined their nation, and who had been shielded from the onslaughts of Satan and had led his followers to success both in this world and in that to come.

Here a law of God which has been mentioned at numerous places in the Qur'ān should be kept in consideration: the messengers of God decide the fate of their respective nations in this very world. Just as the assurance for the believers and the warning for the disbelievers found in the verse relates to the Hereafter, it also relates to this world. This is merely a restatement of what was said at the end of the previous sūrah in the words: فَسَتَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ هُوَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (٢٩:٦٧) (soon you shall know who is in manifest error, (67:29)).

In the expression بِأَيِّكُمْ الْمَقْتُولُ the letter ب apparently seems incongruous with تُبْصِرُ and يُبْصِرُونَ. However, as per a common linguistic principle of Arabic, the word يُبْصِرُونَ encompasses the meaning of يَعْلَمُونَ and if I remember correctly, Zamakhsharī also holds this view and I regard this view to be in accordance with linguistic principles of Arabic.<sup>7</sup>

6. So soon you shall see and they shall also see with which of the groups is the one who has been led away.

7. Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 590.



The word **بِأَيِّ الْحَزِينِ** means **بِأَيِّكُمْ**.

The word **مَفْتُونٌ** does not mean **مَجْنُونٌ** (mad). It connotes its original meaning i.e a person who has been led away by this world and by Satan. In other words, the Qur'ān says that those who are lured away in this manner are in fact **مَجْنُونٌ** (mad), and the group whose reins are controlled by such madmen finally ends up in Hell.

**إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ (٧)**<sup>8</sup>

This is a further emphasis and substantiation of what is said above. Since the Almighty knows full well those who are guided and those who have deviated from this guidance, He will deal with each of these in the manner they are worthy of. It is not possible that those worthy of humiliation will always be blessed with a life of honour and success, nor is it possible that those worthy of success always remain afflicted with the cruelty of the oppressors. This world is not a place where people are not being watched. It is the creation of a creator who has full knowledge of all things. It is essential that it culminate in a day of judgement. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should trust God; He will not deal in the same manner with the righteous and the wrongdoers.

**فَلَا تُطِعِ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٨)**<sup>9</sup>

When the reality is what has been stated above, then the Prophet (sws) should not pay attention to the nonsensical talk of those who deny the punishment of rejecting the Day of Judgement and those who deny the Day of Judgement itself. If these people have no fear of both these punishments, then let them be as they are. If they are satisfied that if ever the Day of Judgement comes, they will be blessed with the same favours as they have been blessed with here, let them remain in the trance of this dream. This world is not revolving around their desires; it has been created by a wise and powerful being, and it is essential that one day His wisdom and justice manifest in their ultimate forms.

The word **إِطَاعَةٌ** here means “to be affected or influenced by something”. It is used in this sense in both the Qur'ān and in classical Arabic.

**وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ (٩)**<sup>10</sup>

This verse unveils the real reason the Prophet's enemies are opposing

8. Your Lord only best knows those who have strayed from His path and those who are rightly guided.

9. So, give no heed to these rejecters.

10. They desire that you be flexible, then they will also become flexible.

him for. In other words, they have no doubt in the veracity of what he says; however, accepting it is against their desires; for this reason they are trying to vehemently pressurize him to soften his stance so that as a result he accepts some of their demands and they accept some of his. In this manner, a compromise is reached. The verse thus brings to light the fact that their opposition is not based on any sincerity with their own religion; it is merely an attempt to bargain their position with the Prophet (sws). As long as they have hope of succeeding in these tactics, they will continue with their efforts; however, as soon as they realize that this is a lost cause, they will lose the will and determination to continue with these.

Here a question arises on the language pattern used by the Qur'ān. According to linguistic principles, the verse should have been thus: **وَدُّوا لَوْ يُدْهِنُونَ**; however, the word used is **يُدْهِنُونَ**. The answer to this question is that a different style has been adopted here; the inchoative (*mubtadā'*) has been suppressed. The sentence actually was **فَهُمْ يَدْهِنُونَ**. The meaning would then be: it is their desire that the Prophet (sws) softens his stance and then they too will soften their attitude. Examples of this style can be seen in the Qur'ān.

**وَلَا تُطِيعُ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ (١٠)**<sup>11</sup>

This verse is co-ordinated to the previous verse, and once again the Prophet (sws) is emphatically warned that he should not pay attention to such people. The verse does not refer to someone in particular, as has been generally understood by people. This and the subsequent verses portray a graphic picture of the moral degradation and depletion of the leadership of the Quraysh. The purpose is to compare the lofty character of the Prophet (sws) alluded to in verse four with the character of such leaders of the Quraysh as Abū Lahab, Walīd ibn Mughīrah, Abū Jahal and Akhnas ibn Shurayq. By this comparison, everyone can decide what fate each will meet.

The fact that these verses do not portray the character of someone in particular and in fact depict the character of the whole leadership of the Quraysh is evident from various aspects.

Firstly, this verse is co-ordinated to the previous verse “pay no attention to the disbelievers”, and the word disbelievers of course does not refer to a specific person; the occasion of this word shows that it refers to all the leadership of the Quraysh.

Secondly, the word **كُلِّ** (every) shows that the character under discussion is that of the complete group and not of a specific individual.

11. And heed not every person who is swearer of false oaths, despicable.

Thirdly, in the coming verses, the word used is **بَلَوْنَاهُمْ** which obviously has a plural pronoun which shows that its antecedent is not an individual but a group of individuals.

Fourthly, the character traits which are portrayed here relate to the complete leadership of the Quraysh; if they are made to relate to a single individual, then this will require a lot of artificial effort.

Once these principles are understood, let us deliberate on the words of the verse.

The word **حَلَّافٌ** refers to a person who swears a lot. I have already explained in this tafsīr that this word never comes in the positive sense. Moreover, here it is qualified by the word **مَهِينٌ** (despicable). Obviously, only that person will swear a lot who has no regard for his own self-esteem. People who have an immoral or blameworthy character always remain in doubt because of their inferiority complex that unless they swear, others will not be convinced of what they are saying. Thus, it is mentioned at many instances in the Qur'ān that the Hypocrites would swear to camouflage their character. As far as the leadership of the Quraysh is concerned, they could not point out the slightest blemish in the Prophet's character nor did have anything to say against Islam based on arguments. The only means they had to fool their masses was to swear profusely that God forbid, he is a poet or a soothsayer, a mad person and someone who imputes lies to God.

<sup>12</sup> **هَمَّازٌ مَشَاءٌ بَنِيمٍ (١١)**

The word **هَمَّازٌ** is an emphatic form of **هَمَزٌ** and means “maker of evil gestures”. Making such evil gestures and verbal caricatures is a special trait of those who want to belittle someone in the eyes of others. Body movements, eyes and eye-brows are also employed for this purpose as well as words and sentences. Examples of the gestures and mocking sentences with which the Quraysh used to target the Prophet (sws) and poor Muslims can be seen in the Qur'ān, and I have also explained them at the relevant places of this tafsīr. Such traits are also referred to in **وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ (١٠٤: ١)** (woe to every back-biting slanderer, (104:1)). The arrogant do not have the force of arguments to support their views; so they try to defeat the cause of truth with whatever evil means they can lay their hands on. In reality, how can such feeble weapons counter the razor-sharp sword of the truth?

The words **نَيْمٍ** and **نَيْمَةٌ** refer to sowing seeds of dissension and back-biting. This is a reference to the activity of horse-trading and causing

---

12. Maker of evil gestures, who goes about sowing seeds of dissension.

disgruntlement in people with which the leadership of the Quraysh would remain pre-occupied day and night, and for this they would use the weapon of back-biting. This was their greatest means of causing dissent and disunity among people.

It was through this means that they were also opposing Islam. They were vehemently engaged in spreading rumours and misconceptions among Muslims in order to cause dissension between them. The purpose was to destroy the seeds of fraternity and brotherhood sown by Islam and to try to make people form absolutely unfounded bad opinions about one another.

### مَنَاعٌ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٌ (١٢)<sup>13</sup>

It is evident from the previous verses that the whole edifice of their leadership stood on lies, back-biting and humiliating others. In this verse, it is explained that these die-hard enemies of virtue who violate the bounds set by God are also ones who usurp the rights of human beings.

The words مَنَاعٌ لِلْخَيْرِ refer in general to people who stop others from doing any kind of virtuous deed; however, here a special reference is to their stinginess: they neither have the heart to spend even a penny on the poor nor can bear seeing others spend on them; they want that others too should become misers like themselves so that they are able to hide their own miserliness. The Qur'an has explained from various aspects this very trait of misers that they lead others to miserliness also so that they their own meanness remains concealed.

The words مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٌ imply that they usurp the rights of others and also do not fulfill the rights of others imposed on them. The word اِغْتَدَا refers to the first type of sin and the word اِثْمٌ to the second type. Thus these people not only are misers and want others to be misers too, they also have these traits.

### عُتْلٌ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ زَنِيمٌ (١٣)<sup>14</sup>

The word عُتْلٌ means "cruel and ruthless". A person who is stingy shall necessarily be cruel. This is only the inner aspect of the traits mentioned earlier. It is about these people that the Qur'an has said: اَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالَّذِينَ فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ (١٠٣: ١-٢) (have you seen the one who belies reward and punishment?! He it is who drives away the orphan, (103:1-2)).

The word زَنِيمٌ is explained thus by lexicographers: الملحق بقوم ليس منهم ولا يحتاجون إليه (a person who associates himself with the lineage of a clan whereas he actually does not belong to it and the clan also feel no

13. Forbiddor of good, transgressor, usurper of rights.

14. Cruel and moreover is rootless.

need of him).<sup>15</sup> This word has been formed from زئمة, which refers to glands that hang from the necks of goats, and their status is that of a redundant limb of the body. It is mentioned in some narratives that Akhnas ibn Shurayq belonged to the Thaḳīf tribe but he claimed to belong to the Zahrah tribe. Similarly, it is known that Walīd ibn Muḡhīrah claimed to belong to the Quraysh tribe although he did not belong to it. People who want to associate themselves with superior tribes regarding their own lineage to be worthless are generally show-offs. Such people have a habit of flattery and sycophancy and putting up a false show of national pride to earn credibility in the clan. Thus such “impure” Qurayshites were specially in the forefront in opposing the Prophet (sws). To show their deep affiliation to their clan, they would try to instigate their people against the Prophet (sws) by alleging that his preaching was causing dissensions in the unity of the Quraysh. It is such show-offs that the Qur’ān has pointed out and said that besides immoral traits which these leaders have, there are some parasites who claim to be more loyal than the real members of the clan and have become the custodians of their traditions of the age of *jāhilliyah*. Their evil nature has been further incited by more evil. The Qur’ān here has harshly commented in this manner on a character trait which necessarily finds expression in people who are afflicted with the malady of inferiority complex and lack of self-confidence.

أَنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ<sup>16</sup> (١٤)

Mentioned in this verse is the reason for such a character. This verse is very subtle: if God had blessed them with wealth and children they should have shown gratitude and obedience to Him and should have become the proponents of the truth revealed by Him; on the contrary, they became ingrates and utterly defiant. It is mentioned at many instances in the Qur’ān in different styles that the purpose of God in blessing people with favours is to test them whether they become grateful or being overcome with arrogance start following Satan. It is in this same trial that the Almighty put these people but they badly failed in it and their blessings became a means of God’s wrath.

15. The Arabic text quoted is close to what is found in *Al-Mu’jam al-waṭī*. See: Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā, Aḡmad al-Zayyāt, Ḥamid ‘Abd al-Qādir, Muḡammad al-Najjār, *Al-Mu’jam al-waṭī* (n.p.: Dār al-da ‘wah, n.d.), 403.

16. This character is so because he has wealth and children.

إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٥)<sup>17</sup>

This is a portrayal of the arrogance and haughtiness with which these people were overcome. Instead of seeking a lesson from nations who had been destroyed because they too had been similarly inflicted with arrogance and haughtiness, they make fun of them when their accounts are mentioned to them. They regard them to be ancient stories which have no link with the present. What they implied was that neither were they willing to accept the relater of such tales to be a prophet nor would they be over-awed by such tales; what relation have these tales to rejecting or accepting a prophet of God, they contended.

سَنَسِمُهُ عَلَى الْخُرْطُومِ (١٦)<sup>18</sup>

This is the punishment these people will encounter in the Hereafter for their pride and arrogance. The word خُرْطُوم means “trunk”. Here it is used as a metaphor for the noses of such people because these people were opposing the Prophet (sws) only to keep their noses high. If someone becomes so infatuated with keeping his nose high that he is ready to deny the most obvious of truths, then this means that his nose is not merely a nose, he has actually enlarged and inflated it to become a trunk. It is for this crime that soon the Almighty will brand him on his trunk and everyone will see this humiliation he will go through. This is a very apt expression of arrogance and its punishment; its subtlety and eloquence are beyond words.

إِنَّا بَلَوْنَاهُمْ كَمَا بَلَوْنَا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا لَيَصْرِمُنَّهَا مُصْبِحِينَ (١٧)<sup>19</sup>

In order to highlight the hollowness of the character of the leadership mentioned above, a parable is recounted here to them. In it, they are shown that their authority which has made them so conceited and proud that they are making fun of the warnings of the Prophet (sws) has no foundation. Whenever the Almighty wishes, He can deprive them of it in the blink of an eye. At that time, they will mourn their wretchedness, and will even repent before Him but this will be of no use to them.

The antecedent of the pronoun هُمْ (they) in بَلَوْنَاهُمْ obviously refers to the

17. When Our revelations are recited to him he cries out: These are but tales of the ancients.

18. Soon on his trunk will We brand him.

19. We put them through a test just as We put the owners of the orchard through a test when they swore that they would surely pick the fruit of their orchard in the morning

people whose character has been discussed earlier. This alone, as has been indicated earlier, is a very clear indication of the fact that this character is not that of a specific individual; it is that of the total leadership of the Quraysh. Had only one person's character been discussed, the pronoun would have been singular.

Similarly, another important point relating to the language should be kept in consideration. In the expression أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ, the word الْجَنَّة has an *alif lām* which apparently means that the reference is to some specific people of the orchard. The defining *alif lāms* or demonstrative nouns (الَّتِي or الَّذِي) which occur in parables are not meant to point to some specific entity, as has been explained in this *tafsīr* at a number of occasions. Their purpose is only to portray the overall situation so that the reader gets to know the complete picture. For this reason, there is no need to go after finding out the incident that relates to the owners of a particular orchard in Yemen or in Sana as has been done by our exegetes. This is merely a picture of the mentality and fate of the leadership of the Quraysh portrayed in a manner that no aspect remains hidden.

The words إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا لَيَصْرُنَّهَا مُصْبِحِينَ refer to the confidence which the people of the orchard had in their success. They were very satisfied and content that their orchard had braved various phases of weather change and had become safe and secure from all calamities. In their opinion, the only thing left for them to do was to go there the next day and pick its fruit and bring it home. Consequently, they swore to express this intention that the next morning they would definitely harvest its fruit.

وَلَا يَسْتَنْتُونَ<sup>20</sup> (١٨)

Generally, people have interpreted this verse to mean that while swearing these people did not utter the words إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ (if God wills). In other words, they were so sure of their success that they could not in the slightest think of anything that could cause any impediment in this. Although all the exegetes are unanimous in this interpretation, I personally am not convinced about it. Although the word إِسْتِثْنَاء can be possibly translated thus however the style adopted is not appropriate to convey the derived meaning. In such a case, instead of saying وَلَا يَسْتَنْتُونَ the words should have been وَلَمْ يَسْتَنْتُوا or something similar. The word إِسْتِثْنَاء is not a very explicit word for saying إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ. If it has to imply this meaning, then there must be some contextual indication for it. Here we find no such satisfactory indication.

In my opinion, the word is used in its literal meaning. They swore that

20. And would not leave anything.

they would necessarily pick the fruit of the orchard and would not leave any of them. In other words, what they swore was that they would pick all the fruit and leave nothing for the poor. Leaving some fruit for the poor and needy is a common age old custom found in generous and pious people. It is mentioned in the Bible:

Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus, 19:10).

It is while keeping this known tradition in mind that these people swore that they would not follow this tradition. They swore to lay emphasis on their statement otherwise such swearing was not needed in the statement.

Since in this parable the character of the leaders of the Quraysh has been highlighted by calling them مَنَاعٌ لِلْخَيْرِ (forbider of good), عَتُلٌّ (cruel) and أَثِيمٌ (usurper of rights), the oath sworn by the owners of the orchard is specially mentioned here so that the similarity between the two is highlighted. Readers should recall to their minds the picture of the stinginess of Abū Lahab and his associates portrayed by the Qur'ān at various places.

فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا طَائِفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ (١٩) فَأَصْبَحَتْ كَالصَّرِيمِ (٢٠)<sup>21</sup>

What happened in the orchard is attributed to God and this alludes to two things: firstly, the calamity arrived without the slightest expectation that it would, and secondly, it was so devastating in nature that it miraculously routed the orchard to nothingness in the blink of an eye.

The Prophet (sws) is addressed in the words مِّن رَّبِّكَ (from your Lord) to assure him. In the initial verses of this *sūrah*, the Prophet (sws) is told that if today he warns these people of God's punishment, they regard him to be a person possessed since they see themselves in smooth circumstances. They fail to understand from where this punishment would descend on them. This parable has shown them that the punishment of God comes in such a manner that all of man's schemes which he devises with the conviction of pledges and oaths are rendered into ruin when he wakes up to embark upon executing them.

---

21. Then whilst they were asleep, a mover from your Lord moved through it in such a manner that it became like a crop harvested.



فَتَنَادُوا مُصْبِحِينَ (٢١) أَنْ اْعْدُوا عَلَىٰ حَرْثِكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَارِمِينَ (٢٢)<sup>22</sup>

The word حَرْث actually means “sown land”; here it refers to the orchard mentioned earlier. The reason for this is, as has already been indicated before, that in Arabia within orchards there were pieces of land in which various crops would be sown. For this reason, both the word orchard (جَنَّةٌ) and sown land (حَرْث) are used for such areas.

The words إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَارِمِينَ (if you are to pick its fruit) are to challenge and convince their associates. What is implied is that if they want to carry out this task, they should not waste time and immediately proceed to the place; otherwise, they might incur loss.

فَانْطَلَقُوا وَهُمْ يَتَخَفَتُونَ (٢٣) أَنْ لَا يَدْخُلَنَّهَا الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَسْكِينٌ (٢٤)<sup>23</sup>

This is another portrayal of their stinginess. Earlier on, the words وَلَا يَسْتَتْنُونَ (and would not leave anything) also referred to this despicable trait in them.

وَعَدُوا عَلَىٰ حَرْدٍ قَادِرِينَ (٢٥)<sup>24</sup>

The word حَرْد means “enthusiasm, freshness, resolve and hurried-gait”. The implication is that they were fully prepared to protect themselves from being followed by the poor and needy, and marched off to the orchard with grit and resolve. The word قَادِرِينَ portrays their inner confidence and determination that soon they would be able to realize their aim: the fruit was ripe to be picked and no one could interfere to stop them; the only fear was from the poor and that too had been taken care of.

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهَا قَالُوا إِنَّا لَضَالُّونَ (٢٦) بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ (٢٧)<sup>25</sup>

Such was the extent of devastation met by the orchard that at first sight they were not able to recognize it. They thought that they had lost their way in the dark but they soon realized what had happened. All their desires and wishes were dashed to the ground. Their orchard was ruined and they were deprived of this prized possession.

22. At daybreak, they called out to one another: “Go early in the morning to your plantation if you are to pick its fruit.”

23. Then off they went whispering to one another: “No needy person should set foot in this orchard today.”

24. And they proceeded with resolve and determination.

25. But when they saw it, they cried out: “Surely we have lost our way; in fact, we have been ruined.”

قَالَ أَوْسَطُهُمْ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ لَوْلَا تُسَبِّحُونَ (٢٨)<sup>26</sup>

The word أَوْسَطُهُمْ refers to the most upright and fair person among them. Even the most evil of societies have some noble souls who stop people from their ill-ways whether those sunk in oblivion hear them or not. A similar person was found among them who would, at various instances, remind them to be heedful of God and to glorify Him. The word تَسْبِيحٌ is very comprehensive in nature and encompasses remembering the Almighty as well as worshipping Him. Initially, his exhortations were met with a deaf ear but later when they saw the consequences of their attitude, they realized that God was a reality and that this person was not wrong in his counsel.

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَ رَبَّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ (٢٩)<sup>27</sup>

These words were their instant reaction. They realized that they were so inebriated with their success that they forgot the majesty of God, and if someone tried to remind them of it, they never paid heed.

This confession is similar to the confession made by the Pharaoh when he and his army were about to drown. Such repentance is too late to be accepted and is of no avail.

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَلَوْمُونَ (٣٠) قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا طَاغِينَ (٣١)<sup>28</sup>

After meeting this fate, everyone started the blame game. People who are not sensible blame one another when they see the consequences of their foolishness even though all are to be equally blamed for the mishap. The only difference is that some lead the way in creating such disorder and others blindly follow them. At last, they all have to confess that all of them are responsible for the crime.

عَسَى رَبُّنَا أَنْ يُبَدِّلَنَا حَيْرًا مِنْهَا إِنَّا إِلَى رَبِّنَا رَاغِبُونَ (٣٢)<sup>29</sup>

This is what they said later after blaming one another.

Here the Qur'ān has not commented upon whether their hope was

26. Said a somewhat balanced person among them: "Did I not tell you: why do you not glorify the Lord?"

27. Then they cried out: Glory be to our Lord; indeed it is we who were the wrongdoers.

28. Then they started blaming one another: "Woe to us. they cried. We have been great transgressors."

29. Perhaps our Lord will give us in its place a better orchard than it. To Him do we now turn.

fulfilled or not. However, as per divine practice, people who repent after the time for repentance expires are not entertained by the Almighty.

For the purpose that the Quraysh are recounted this parable, a similar parable occurs in verses 32-43 of Sūrah Kahf.

كَذَلِكَ الْعَذَابُ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ<sup>30</sup> (٣٣)

After recounting the parable, the Quraysh are warned that the punishment with which the Messenger of God is threatening them will come to them in a similar manner. Today they are engrossed in their pleasures and have no fear of God seizing them. If the Prophet (sws) is warning them of this danger, they call him a mad person. They are not able to understand from where this punishment will descend on them. The fact of the matter is that it will come to them from where they cannot even imagine. At that time, they will encounter something very similar to what the owners of the orchard encountered; however, their wailings at that time will be absolutely useless to them.

The words كَذَلِكَ الْعَذَابُ point to the punishment which according to an unalterable divine practice comes to a people who reject its Messenger after he has conclusively communicated the truth to it. This punishment, as I have pointed out at several places, decides the fate of such people. After that they will face the punishment of the Hereafter which will be much greater than this punishment. The Messengers of God, warned their people of both these types of punishment.

The words لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ express yearning and sorrow: these foolish and reckless people regard the Hereafter to be improbable even though it is inevitable and the punishment it will bring is very horrible; only if these people cared to know and understand.

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٍ النَّعِيمِ<sup>31</sup> (٣٤)

After a delineation of the fate of the arrogant, mentioned in this verse is the reward for the God-fearing (مُتَّقِينَ). For people who led their lives in this world while remaining fearful of their accountability in the Hereafter, there are gardens of bliss with their Lord. The God-fearing are mentioned in parallel to the arrogant who were so deeply inebriated with their worldly successes that this had left them unafraid of God's grasp and the punishment of the Hereafter. From this contrast, one can gauge who the God-fearing are: they are people who have not been lured away

30. In such a way, shall the punishment come, and the punishment of the Hereafter shall be much greater than this. Would that these people only knew!

31. Indeed for the pious, there are gardens of bliss with their Lord.

by the pleasures of this world; they are fully aware of the reality.

أَفَنَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ (٣٥)<sup>32</sup>

Mentioned in this verse is the reason for which the God-fearing will be awarded such gardens of bliss. It is said that this is but a natural requisite of God's justice and mercy. If this does not happen, it will mean that to the Creator of this world the righteous and the wrongdoers, the loyal and the traitors, the believers and the disbelievers are equal. This obviously conflicts with the higher attributes of God. How can good and evil be equal in His eyes?

مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (٣٦)<sup>33</sup>

Amazement is expressed on the attitude of the arrogant. The implication of these questions is that if they do not believe in the accountability of the Hereafter, and that the only life is the life of this world which will either continue forever or end one day, then this means that they regard the Creator to be devoid of the attributes of justice and mercy Who does not care whether people are pious or impious. If this is their verdict, they should think how far away it is from sense and reason. What a great allegation they make on the Creator Whose providence, mercy, power and wisdom is borne witness to by every speck and object of this universe.

It is obvious from this question of the Qur'ān that human intellect and nature do not accept this verdict. If some accept this verdict, then this can only mean two things: either they are merely deceiving their intellect while being helpless before their desires and negate their nature or they have perverted both their intellect and nature.

أَمْ لَكُمْ كِتَابٌ فِيهِ تَدْرُسُونَ (٣٧) إِنَّ لَكُمْ فِيهِ لَمَا يَتَخَيَّرُونَ (٣٨)<sup>34</sup>

This is another scathing criticism on another baseless desire of the Quraysh: they claimed that in the first place there was no such thing as the Hereafter and if ever it was going to come, they would be blessed with even more than what they had in the world. They were inflicted with the misconception that if they were not favourites of God, how could they have been blessed with such political and social leadership; so, they contended, that if they were favourites of God, they would be given even more in the Hereafter. It is on this misconception that these

32. Should We equate the obedient with those who transgress?

33. What is the matter with you? What is this judgement you make?

34. Have you a scripture in which you read that you will have whatever you desire?

verses address them and ask what had led them to this misunderstanding and whether they had a scripture from God which guaranteed that all their desires would be fulfilled. The implication of these questions is that these desires which they nurture in their hearts have no basis in sense and reason; yes, if they have a divine scripture in support of this claim, they should present it.

35 أَمْ لَكُمْ أَيْمَانٌ عَلَيْنَا بِالْعَقَّةِ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ لَكُمْ لَمَا تَحْكُمُونَ (٣٩)

The answer to this question of course has to be in the negative. So when this is so, on what basis do they vainly claim that neither can anyone touch them here in this world nor will they be accountable in the Hereafter?

Here it should remain clear that the promises made by the Almighty with nations regarding their success in the Hereafter are conditional to them adhering to the faith and doing righteous deeds and to the fulfillment of covenants pledged with Him through His messengers. He has never made any promise with any nation abiding till the Day of Judgement. The covenant made by the Almighty with both branches of Abraham's progeny regarding leadership in this world is mentioned both in the Torah and in the Qur'ān. It is absolutely evident from it that this covenant does not relate to people who become wrongdoers by breaking the promise of God. After Abraham (sws) successfully passed the trial of Ishmael's sacrifice, the Almighty gave him glad tidings of being given the leadership of the world in the words: إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا (١٢٤:٢) (I will appoint you the leader of mankind, (2:124)). Abraham (sws) then asked him: وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي (٢: ١٢٤) (what of my progeny? (2:124)). The Almighty's immediate reply was: لَا يَتَّالِ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ (٢: ١٢٤) (My covenant does not relate to those among your progeny who wrong their souls by breaking it, (2:124)). Obviously, just as this verdict of God relates to the Israelites, it also relates to the Ishmaelites. However, the Quraysh by vainly regarding themselves to be the progeny of Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws) believed that they would not be held accountable before God; similarly, the Israelites also being inebriated with the notion of نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّاؤُهُ (١٨:٥) (we are the children of God and His loved ones, (5:18)) ended up in absolving themselves from being held accountable before God.

---

35. Or have you oaths with Us binding till the Day of Judgement that you will have what you yourselves ordain?

سَلِّمُوا إِلَيْهِمْ بِذَلِكَ زَعِيمٌ (٤٠) أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ فَلْيَأْتُوا بِشُرَكَائِهِمْ إِنْ كَانُوا صَادِقِينَ (٤١)<sup>36</sup>

These questions are posed to them so that they bring forward such guarantors and associates or even merely mention their name so that others are also able to assess their rank and status. It needs to be kept in consideration that the deities which the Idolaters of Makkah were very proud of and who they thought were very dear to God and would save them from God's grasp had been so very clearly rendered baseless and unfounded by the Qur'ān that in response to this challenge the Quraysh could not have dared to present their names.

يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَنْ سَاقٍ وَيُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ (٤٢) خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهُفُهُمْ ذَلَّةٌ وَقَدْ كَانُوا يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ وَهُمْ سَالِمُونَ (٤٣)<sup>37</sup>

The expression ساق كشف is a common Arabic idiom to express the severity of a situation. Poets of the age of *jāhiliyyah* have used it in various ways. A famous couplet of Hātim reads:

أخو الحرب ام عضت به الحرب عضها  
وان شمرت عن ساقها الحرب شمرا

(The praised person is a warrior. If a battle attacks him, he also fights with it, and if the situation becomes severe, he jumps into the battle without any inhibition.)<sup>38</sup>

The reason why this idiom expresses the severity of a situation is that whenever an upheaval takes place, chaste and decent ladies are forced to flee while raising their legware as a result of which both their shins and the jewelry worn on them are exposed. A poet says:

تذهل الشيخ عن بنييه  
وتبتدي عن خدام العقيلة العذراء

36. Ask them: "Who among them will take responsibility of this?" Do they have some associates? Let them produce these associates if what they say be true.

37. They must remember the day when a great tumult will take place, and they will be called to bow in adoration and they will not be able to do so. Downcast shall be their looks; ignominy shall cover them. And they also used to be called to bow in adoration when they were normal.

38. Hātim Tā'ī, *Dīwān*, vol. 1, 24.

(An upheaval which will make the aged forget their children and which will expose the shins and shin jewelry.)<sup>39</sup>

The implication of this verse is that whilst these people may be dreaming of having the same luxuries they have here, that Day will be very cataclysmic. Today, when they are called to prostrate before the Almighty, they show arrogance; however, on that Day when they will be asked to prostrate themselves their backs will become hard and inflexible and in spite of wanting to prostrate they will not be able to do so. Their eyes will be downcast and ignominy will cover them. Their whole person from head to toe will bear witness to their helplessness and humiliation.

The directive of calling them to prostrate themselves will obviously be given to humiliate them and to show them that they had no excuse to deny the truth; in other words, their own being will bear irrefutable testimony to their arrogance and deprivation.

In Sūrah Ma‘ārij, this topic is discussed in the following words:

يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا كَانَتْهُمْ إِلَى نُصْبٍ يُوفِضُونَ خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ  
تَرْهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ الَّذِي كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ (٧٠: ٤٣-٤٤)

The Day on which they will emerge from their graves as if racing towards targets marked. Their eyes will be downcast; ignominy will cover them. This is the Day about which they had been warned. (70:43-44)

In other words, what is said in this *sūrah* by the words *يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا* is expressed in Sūrah Ma‘ārij by the words *يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا* (the Day on which they will emerge from their graves as if racing). Thus, both language and parallels of the Qur‘ān corroborate the meaning I have taken.

Some people, on the basis of a narrative, have interpreted this verse as: “the Day the Almighty will expose His shin”,<sup>40</sup> however, many authorities of *tafsīr* have recorded the same interpretation as I have adopted. A narrative from Ibn ‘Abbās (rta) reported by ‘Ikramah says that it refers to the Day of Judgement which will be a Day of harshness and brutality.<sup>41</sup> Ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās (rta) has also recorded the opinion of a poet in support of this opinion; the idiom

39. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 12, 167.

40. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, vol. 29 (Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001), 48.

41. Ibid., vol. 29, 47.

قامت الحرب بنا على ساق is used in it.<sup>42</sup> Mujāhid,<sup>43</sup> another *tafsīr* authority has also adopted this meaning.

فَذَرْنِي وَمَنْ يُكَذِّبُ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٤٤)<sup>44</sup>

This is a threat sounded to the rejecters of the Qur'ān mentioned in verse fifteen earlier by the words: *إِذَا تُتْلَى عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ* (when Our revelations are recited to him he cries out: “these are but tales of the ancients.”) This threat at the same time has a note of assurance for the Prophet (sws): he has done what was required of him and now he should leave things to God Who is sufficient by Himself to settle their matter; He will gradually lead them to their destruction and the respite which He is now giving them is further entangling them while they count this to be their success.

وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ (٤٥)<sup>45</sup>

The Almighty is giving them time to do whatever they want to; however, this does not mean that they are beyond His control; His scheme is very sound.

أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ أَجْرًا فَهُمْ مِنْ مَغْرَمٍ مُثْقَلُونَ (٤٦)<sup>46</sup>

This is an expression of amazement at their aversion to the Qur'ān: why is it that they don't even bother to hear what the Prophet (sws) is telling them; how will hearing him out harm them? After all, he is not demanding any payment for this service. Found in this verse is also an assurance to the Prophet (sws) in a passing manner. He should not fret over them; if they are running away from this great blessing, they are only depriving themselves; as far as the Prophet (sws) is concerned, he has succeeded before God in his mission for he is distributing this divine treasure for free.

42. Ibid., vol. 29, 47.

43. Ibid., vol. 29, 48.

44. So leave Me with those who are denying this discourse. We are gradually bringing them from a place they know not.

45. And I am giving them respite. Indeed, very truly powerful is My scheme.

46. Are you demanding some payment from them so that they are burdened with its penalty?



أَمْ عِنْدَهُمُ الْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُمُونَ (٤٧)<sup>47</sup>

This is another expression of wonder on the indifference and unconcern shown to the warnings given to these people by the Prophet (sws). What is the reason for this apathy? Do they have the knowledge of the Unseen that if the Hereafter will come, they will be blessed with high status? The implication is that holding on to one's desires without any grounds, living in a fool's paradise and ignoring the facts of life is no wisdom; this attitude will only lead them to eternal doom.

This verse also occurs in Sūrah Tūr. I have explained it there in the light of its context. Its context in Sūrah Najm explains its meaning completely:

أَعِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ فَهُوَ يَرَىٰ أَمْ لَمْ يَنْبَأْ بِمَا فِي صُحُفِ مُوسَىٰ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِي وَفَّىٰ أَلَّا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ (٥٣: ٣٦-٣٨)

Has he the knowledge of the Hidden; thus he is seeing it.? Has he not heard of what is preached in the scriptures of Moses and Abraham, who fulfilled his duty: that no soul shall bear another's burden? (53:35-38)

فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُنْ كَصَاحِبِ الْخُوْتِ إِذْ نَادَىٰ وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ (٤٨)<sup>48</sup>

The word فَاصْبِرْ (be patient) encompasses the meaning of اِنْتَظِرْ (wait) because it is mentioned with the preposition ل. Here at the end of the sūrah, the Prophet (sws) is being assured to be steadfast and wait for the verdict of God, and be on guard that he too does not end up making a mistake like Jonah (sws) who became impatient.

The expression “companion of the fish” obviously refers to Jonah (sws). There is an element of affection in calling him with this name and it also indicates the trial he had to go through.

I have elaborated on the whole incident of Jonah (sws) in this tafsīr: when his people did not value his preaching, he was so overwhelmed by their apathy that he left them without the God's permission; at this, he was rebuked by the Almighty and had to undergo a trial in the belly of a fish. It is by referring to this incident that the Prophet (sws) is told that even though his people are also not paying heed to his call, are showing their disinterest and have become adamant on denying him, he should remain steadfast and firm and wait for the decision of his Lord. He

47. Or is it that they have knowledge of the Unseen; thus they are writing it down?

48. So with patience wait for the judgement of your Lord and be not like the companion of the fish when he called His Lord in anguish.

should not make the mistake of leaving his people until the Almighty tells him to lest he too faces a trial similar to the one faced by Jonah (sws).

The words **إِذْ نَادَىٰ وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ** (when he called in anguish) briefly refer to the attitude adopted by Jonah (sws) right after the trial. He immediately realized his mistake, and in a state of deep anguish he remembered God with the immortal words: **لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ** (87:21) (there is no god but You; glory be to You! I have wronged my soul, (21:87)). I have already explained their eloquence while writing the *tafsīr* of the above verse. Here it is mentioned as a guide so that no misconception should arise from the words of Jonah (sws) and that it should remain clear that though he committed a folly by being overwhelmed with a notion, he immediately repented, and the Almighty once again chose him, as is evident from the subsequent verse.

لَوْلَا أَنْ تَدَارَكَهُ نِعْمَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ لَئِيدٌ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ مَذْمُومٌ (٤٩) فَاجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَجَعَلَهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (٥٠)<sup>49</sup>

The word **نِعْمَةٌ** (favour) here refers to that favour of the Almighty which was bestowed upon Jonah (sws) in the form of being once again granted prophethood after he repented and this repentance was accepted by the Almighty. The Almighty once again chose him as a prophet so that he could complete his holy mission. What is implied is that he did not fail in this world; he was regarded among the righteous who were the ones who succeeded.

وَإِنْ يَكَادُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُوا الذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ لَمَجْنُونٌ (٥١)<sup>50</sup>

This verse also urges the Prophet (sws) to be patient and persevering, as is already expressed in verse forty eight earlier. Even though the circumstances are tough and they make such allegations, he should remain patient. Here one should once again refresh the opening verses of the *sūrah*: **مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٌ**: *sūrah*. It is evident that the *sūrah* ends on the same topic as it began.

49. Had not the favour of His Lord found him, he would have remained in the wilderness in disgrace. So His Lord chose him and placed him among the righteous.

50. And when these disbelievers hear the reminder, they look at you as if they would almost make you stumble with their eyes and say: "He is surely possessed."

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ<sup>51</sup>

What this verse implies is that if after hearing this they call the Prophet (sws) a person possessed, let them do so; they should however remember that this Qur'ān is not the product of a mad person; if they do not heed this reminder, they will regret it one day but this regret will be of no use to them at that time.

By the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. **فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ** عَلَى إِحْسَانِهِ (gratitude be to God for His favour).

Rahmānābād,  
30<sup>th</sup> July, 1978 AD  
23<sup>rd</sup> Sha'bān, 1398 AH

---



---

51. Yet it is only a reminder to all mankind.